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Annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action

Summary

Today there are approximately 350 million children living in areas affected by conflict who lack access to adequate medical care, quality education, proper nutrition and protection.[1] Over the past 10 years, the number of children living in conflict zones has increased by 74 per cent and protracted crises persist with no signs of abating. These complex crises have resulted in mass displacement, with an estimated 65 million people around the globe forced to flee their homes.[2] In line with recent discussions with members of the Executive Board, this paper provides an update on the humanitarian situation in 2017, the UNICEF humanitarian response over the course of the year, and the key challenges faced and the road ahead, focusing on how the organization is improving efficiency and effectiveness for humanitarian results. A draft decision is included for consideration by the Executive Board.

* E/ICEF/2018/8.

[1] Save the Children International, *The War on Children: Time to end grave violations against children in conflict*. London, 2018.

[2] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Figures at a Glance', available at: www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html, accessed on 1 March 2018.

Note: The present document was processed in its entirety by UNICEF.

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I. The humanitarian situation in 2017

1. Conflicts that have endured for years – such as those in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine, Yemen and the Lake Chad Basin – continued to deepen in complexity in 2017, bringing new waves of violence, displacement and disruption to children's lives.

2. The children affected by these conflicts came under attack at a shocking scale. Some were targeted and exposed to brutal violence in their homes and schools. Others endured unimaginable abuse and exploitation, including sexual violence, forced marriage and recruitment into armed groups. And millions were uprooted from their homes, went hungry and fell ill with life-threatening diseases.

3. The year also saw millions of people impacted by sudden-onset emergencies and the escalation of existing crises. In August, renewed violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar, drove hundreds of thousands of Rohingya across the border into the Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh. During the second half of the year, more than half a million people had entered Bangladesh, bringing the total number of Rohingya and affected local communities in humanitarian need to more than 1.2 million, including 720,000 affected children. In the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, increasing violence left more than 1.7 million people displaced by the end of the year. Across the country, in 2018, it is projected that 2 million children will suffer from severe acute malnutrition.

4. In several countries in 2017 – including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen – violent clashes and the collapse of public services led to the breakdown of health, water and sanitation systems, which fuelled the spread of cholera through affected communities and generated an emergency within an emergency. Other disease outbreaks exacerbated by conflict were also documented, for example the onset of diphtheria in Bangladesh.

5. As conflicts continued to intensify, so did the impact of natural disasters. In September, Hurricane Irma, which was one of the most powerful hurricanes ever recorded over the Atlantic Ocean, and Hurricane Maria, which followed soon afterwards, caused devastation across the Caribbean and an extensive breakdown of essential services in several countries. The hurricanes left more than 1.4 million people, including more than 350,000 children, in need of humanitarian assistance.

II. UNICEF humanitarian response in 2017

A. Global response in 2017

6. As the humanitarian caseload has continued to grow over the past decade, so has the magnitude of the UNICEF response. Between 2007 and 2017, the organization's emergency appeals increased more than fourfold, from $847 million to $3.79 billion by December 2017. In 2017, UNICEF and partners responded to 337 humanitarian situations of varying scale in 102 countries – the second largest number of situations and countries recorded since tracking began in 2005.

7. In line with the Strategic Plan, 2014–2017 and the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF focused its humanitarian response in 2017 on saving lives, protecting rights and addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability to crises. The organization continued to leverage its long-standing comparative

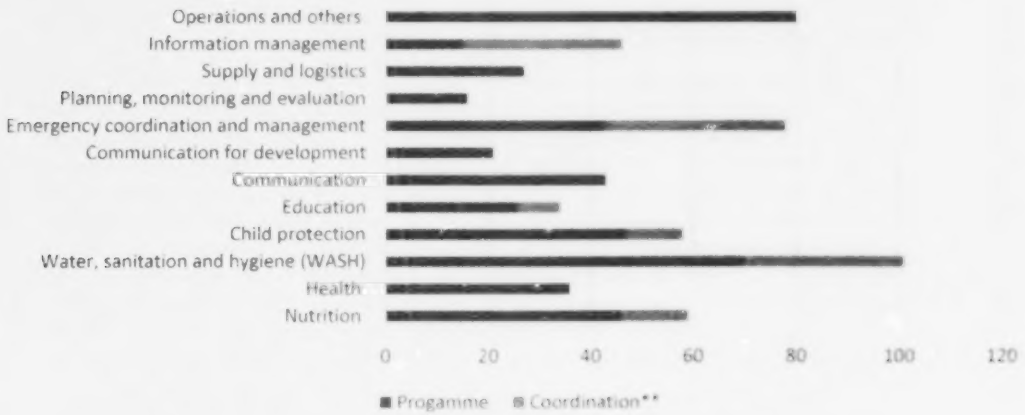
advantage of having a field presence before, during and after emergencies; delivering multisectoral support and harnessing its vast network of partners, which includes Governments, civil society and the private sector, within the broader humanitarian system. UNICEF also continued to facilitate inter-agency coordination, including by fulfilling its cluster accountabilities in large-scale emergencies.

8. This advantage enabled UNICEF to deliver results for millions of children in 2017.[3] Globally, more than 32.7 million people benefited from UNICEF-supported access to safe water (95 per cent of the target); nearly 3 million children with severe acute malnutrition were treated in UNICEF-supported therapeutic feeding programmes (83 per cent of the target); more than 18 million children aged 6 months to 15 years received measles vaccination (74 per cent of the target); and more than 46,000 HIV-positive pregnant women continued antiretroviral therapy (81 per cent of the target). UNICEF also reached more than 8.8 million school-age children with formal or non-formal education (73 per cent of the target) and more than 3.5 million children with psychosocial support (89 per cent of the target). The reasons 100 per cent of the targets were not achieved are discussed in section III of this report.

9. A total of 599 emergency (surge) deployments were completed and/or active in 2017, representing a slight increase over the 576 surge deployments in 2016. The year's deployments totalled 33,418 days, with an average mission length of 58 days. The largest share of deployments (30 per cent, or 177 deployments) supported the humanitarian response to the refugee crisis in Bangladesh. The Yemen response benefited from 40 deployments; drought responses in Ethiopia and Somalia received 34 and 30 deployments, respectively; and the displacement crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo received 29 deployments. The bulk of deployments provided personnel for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) (101), emergency coordination (78), nutrition (59), child protection (58) and information management (46).

[3] The data provided on the 2017 UNICEF humanitarian response are provisional as of 12 February 2018. The data may not reflect more up-to-date sources that will be ready later in 2018, such as the consolidated emergency reports or the UNICEF Annual Results Report 2017 – Humanitarian Action.

Figure I
Emergency deployments,* by functional area, 2017



* This does not include 23 standby partner deployments in support of emergency preparedness: WASH: 5; child protection: 5; nutrition: 4; cash programming: 3; emergency management: 3; education: 2; and health: 1.
**Includes Rapid Response Teams, standby partners and UNICEF deployments in support of cluster coordination.

10. UNICEF supply and logistics operations were a key element of the organization's humanitarian response. In 2017, UNICEF procurement for emergencies reached $553.3 million globally.[4] Supplies were received in 61 countries and territories in emergencies. Direct support from UNICEF Supply Division was provided through 16 staff deployments to emergency locations, including the crises in Bangladesh, the Caribbean and Yemen. Over the course of the year, UNICEF procured a total of $112.2 million worth of nutrition products, making it the largest component of total UNICEF emergency supplies by value in 2017.

11. As of 31 December 2017, the Humanitarian Action for Children appeal was 72 per cent funded, reaching $2.73 billion[5], of which $1.98 billion was funding received, representing generous support from the organization's resource partners, and approximately $755 million was funding available from the previous years.[6] The public sector provided most of the humanitarian resources received by UNICEF, accounting for 90 per cent of the funding received and amounting to $1.79 billion. A total of $192.2 million came from the private sector. Funding for the humanitarian response plans reached a new peak. However, given that the level of need grew, the gap between requirements and funding was larger than ever.

12. Humanitarian action remained central to the work of UNICEF in the field, with 55 per cent of all country-level expenses supporting emergency response. In some UNICEF country offices – such as Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic – nearly all expenses were classified as humanitarian. Out of the 30 UNICEF country

[4] Includes all funding types and is based on an improved methodology by Supply Division to better represent the actual emergency supply response to all crises.

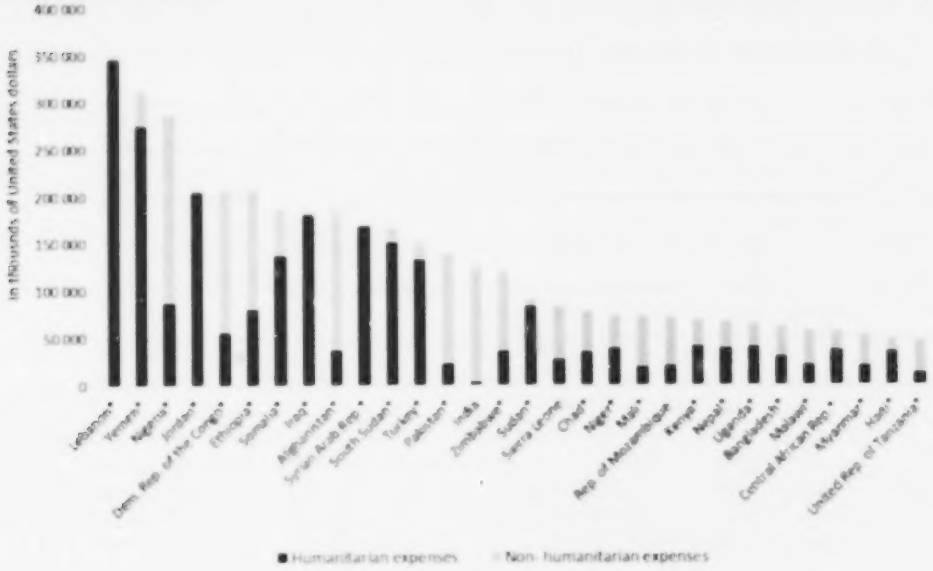
[5] This figure represents other resources emergency (ORE) funds received (cash) in 2017 plus approximate carry-forward from the previous year, which is different from ORE revenue, which represents the contribution signed during a specific year.

[6] Figures are provisional and subject to change. The confirmed breakdown of figures will be made available through the UNICEF Humanitarian Annual Results Report 2017, June 2018.

offices with the largest overall expenses, 27 had appeals in the UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children 2017. These top 30 offices comprised 80 per cent of total country office expenses, both humanitarian and non-humanitarian.

Figure II
Top 30 country offices in total expenses 2017 (in thousands of United States dollars)

Humanitarian expenses (which include all funding types) were 55 per cent of all country-level expenses



* UNICEF country offices with Humanitarian Action for Children appeals in 2017

B. Results from key humanitarian responses

13. The UNICEF humanitarian response in 2017 included seven Level 3 emergencies: the sudden-onset refugee crisis in Bangladesh; significant displacement due to violence in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and protracted conflicts in Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and neighbouring countries hosting refugees and Yemen; as well as four Level 2 emergencies: the protracted conflicts in the Central African Republic and the Lake Chad Basin; the ongoing drought in the Horn of Africa; and the unprecedented category 5 hurricanes in the Caribbean. UNICEF also responded to several outbreaks of cholera, measles and diphtheria, particularly in conflict-affected countries, and in many forgotten humanitarian situations, such as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

14. For example, in 2017, UNICEF provided measles vaccination to nearly 4.4 million children affected by the ongoing crisis in Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and north-eastern Nigeria (more than double the target of 1.8 million). In response to the longest-running and most severe cholera outbreak in the history of South Sudan,

UNICEF-supported health centres treated nearly 4,800 children, or almost half of the total number of cases. Working with health and WASH partners, UNICEF also helped to stem the outbreak by reaching 1.25 million people in cholera-affected counties, including schoolchildren, with prevention messages delivered through household visits, community meetings, water point interventions, roadshows, theatre and megaphone announcements.

15. In Yemen, where more than half of all health facilities are no longer functional, UNICEF supported nutritional screening for more than 2.3 million children aged 6 to 59 months; and treatment for more than 226,500 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition (70 per cent of the target). Where possible, treatment was provided through feeding centres; and in areas with limited access to health facilities, mobile teams were instrumental in providing health and nutritional support to vulnerable children.

16. In the Syrian Arab Republic, more than 5.9 million people gained access to safe water through the repair, rehabilitation or augmentation of water and sanitation systems (exceeding the target) and more than 14.6 million people benefited from continuous support for the operation and maintenance of water and sanitation systems (exceeding the target). UNICEF also rolled out a water system survey targeting more than 3,000 communities in 10 governorates. The survey will help the humanitarian community to prioritize areas for system repairs and maintenance to improve child health, resilience and disease prevention.

17. In Iraq, a consortium led by UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reached more than 2.49 million vulnerable people, including 1.36 million children on the move, with drinking water, hygiene products and ready-to-eat rations, delivered through the Rapid Response Mechanism within the first 72 hours of their displacement (exceeding the target). In the Central African Republic, the Rapid Response Mechanism was essential to providing non-food items to more than 28,000 people and WASH interventions to nearly 83,000 people (exceeding the targets).

18. In the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where violence and insecurity seriously impeded access to education, nearly 27,000 children, including more than 12,000 girls, were reintegrated into the education system. Across the country, nearly 186,000 girls and boys affected by conflict or natural disasters gained access to education and psychosocial activities (52 per cent of the target).

19. In Bangladesh, more than 133,000 children uprooted from their homes benefited from psychosocial support and community-based child protection services through child-friendly spaces designed to shield vulnerable children, particularly girls, from violence, abuse and exploitation (74 per cent of target). In 2017, UNICEF and partners also made significant progress in addressing the specific risks and vulnerabilities of adolescents by providing life-skills-based education and referrals that reached nearly 29,000 crisis-affected adolescent girls (83 per cent of the target).

20. UNICEF continued to prioritize reaching the most vulnerable –particularly girls, children with disabilities and marginalized groups – in humanitarian contexts. For example, in northern Iraq, UNICEF reached nearly 25,000 children from minority communities with child protection services and nearly 150,000 children from minority communities with education support.

21. Addressing the rights of children with disabilities remained a key aspect of the organization's work in emergencies. Over the past four years, the number of UNICEF

country offices reporting on disability-inclusive humanitarian action has increased fivefold. In 2017, a total of 21 UNICEF country offices reported work on children with disabilities in emergency contexts. This included the implementation of WASH infrastructures accessible to people with physical disabilities, in line with UNICEF obligations under the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. For example, in the Syrian Arab Republic, UNICEF supported the rehabilitation of WASH facilities in 558 schools across 10 governorates, ensuring accessibility for children and adults with disabilities, and ultimately benefiting nearly 384,000 students.

22. UNICEF also continued to prioritize gender-based violence prevention and response in key emergencies responses. In 2017, UNICEF reached 3.6 million people through a package of health, counselling and emotional support services, including nearly 345,000 people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, more than 265,000 in Lebanon, nearly 198,000 in South Sudan and some 141,000 in Bangladesh. The WASH response to the refugee situation in Bangladesh incorporated feedback from women and girls on the preferred types of sanitary materials and measures that can be taken to make latrines safer. Community outreach and mobilization related to gender-based violence in emergencies was also conducted during the year, including in the Central African Republic.

C. Resource mobilization

23. In January 2017, UNICEF appealed for $3.36 billion to help 81 million people, including 48 million children, in 48 countries. By the end of 2017, the appeal had risen to $3.79 billion to assist 136 million people, including 60 million children. The increases were mainly due to new refugees in Bangladesh; new internal displacements in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; famine and/or the risk of famine in north-eastern Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan; famine and cholera outbreaks in Yemen; the hurricanes in the Caribbean; and floods in Nepal. Nearly two thirds of the total appeal funded the responses to seven Level 3 emergencies.

24. The top 10 donors to UNICEF humanitarian action contributed $1.8 billion, or 85 per cent of all funding committed in 2017. These included (in alphabetical order, by resource partner type) the Governments of Canada, Germany, Japan, Norway, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America; the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), the country-based pooled funds, the European Commission and the United States Fund for UNICEF. Seven of the top 10 donors increased their commitments over the previous years, with the top donor to UNICEF, the Government of the United States, committing $113 million more in 2017 than in 2016.

25. In terms of flexible funding, only $164 million, or 8 per cent of all emergency funding received, constituted thematic humanitarian funding in 2017, compared with 9 per cent in 2016, while global thematic humanitarian funding stood at 1.4 per cent. The top five providers of thematic humanitarian support were: the German National Committee for UNICEF, the United States Fund for UNICEF, the Government of the Netherlands, the United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF and the Japan Committee for UNICEF.

26. National Committees are an integral part of the UNICEF global organization and in 2017 played an integral role in raising thematic humanitarian funds from the private

sector. Of the total thematic humanitarian funding raised in 2017, 79 per cent was contributions from National Committees.

27. Regular resources to UNICEF also play a critical role in the organization's ability to be flexible in its humanitarian response and respond quickly. For example, thanks to regular resources, through the Emergency Programme Fund, $84.7 million was disbursed to 21 country offices and 3 regional offices for immediate emergency support in 2017. In addition to Emergency Programme Fund support, some $107 million of regular resources contributed to humanitarian action at the country level in 2017.

28. After regular resources, global thematic contributions are the second most flexible funding modality for UNICEF. Global thematic humanitarian funding is allocated on an "as needed" basis and allows for longer-term planning and sustainability of programmes. This type of funding also enables a more equitable and integrated approach to delivering results for children affected by crises. The Government of the Netherlands and the UNICEF National Committees continue to be the global thematic champions for UNICEF, representing 64 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, of contributions to global thematic humanitarian funding. In addition, for the first time, the Government of the Republic of Korea made a two-year (2017/18) commitment for global thematic humanitarian support, contributing $1.7 million in 2017. Other sources of global thematic contributions in 2017 included (in order of contribution amount) the Swedish Committee for UNICEF, the United States Fund for UNICEF, the Government of Denmark, UNICEF Thailand, UNICEF China, international online donations, the Finnish National Committee for UNICEF and the Belgian Committee for UNICEF.

29. The CERF and country-based pooled funds remained important sources of humanitarian funding in 2017, comprising 8 per cent of total humanitarian funding. As of 31 December, $108.9 million had been received from CERF and $48.3 million from country-based pooled funds managed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In 2017, UNICEF programmes in 33 crises benefited from the CERF rapid response window. Based on CERF analyses of funding levels of the various crises and the coordinated and transparent methodology used, the following crises received support from the fund's window for underfunded crises: Afghanistan, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda.

30. Multi-year humanitarian funding offers significant opportunities for flexibility and long-term planning during emergency responses. UNICEF welcomed multi-year contributions from partners including (in alphabetical order, by resource partner type) the Governments of Canada, Germany, Japan, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States; the European Commission; the German Committee for UNICEF, the United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF; and the United States Fund for UNICEF. Longer-term funding allows UNICEF to be more strategic, and more effective and to bridge the humanitarian-development nexus.

31. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNICEF utilized multi-year humanitarian funding from the United Kingdom Department for International Development for a cash transfer programme to support people displaced by the conflict. Due to the longer-term nature of the funding, UNICEF was able to gather and assess data on different transfer modalities and use the evidence to improve delivery

and further develop adapted context-specific tools. Delivery costs were reduced by giving larger one-off grants – the payment option preferred by beneficiaries – rather than smaller regular payments. This allowed for immediate humanitarian needs to be met while facilitating long-term investments into livelihood activities.

32. At the regional level, at 56 per cent of the total, the Middle East and North Africa region received the largest portion of UNICEF 2017 funding, while the Eastern and Southern Africa region received 20 per cent and the West and Central Africa region received 13 per cent. The East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and Caribbean and South Asia regions received the least funding across all regions, with a total of 9 per cent of total humanitarian funding in 2017.

33. While the total amount of funding from donors in 2017 was similar to the previous year, given the extraordinary number of affected children, resources fell short. More than half of the total funds available went to Syrian refugees living in neighbouring host countries, South Sudan and Yemen, with the public sector covering more than 90 per cent of the funding. On the other hand, only 2 per cent of the total funds available covered nine emergencies: Angola, Burundian refugees, the Caribbean hurricanes, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Djibouti, Eritrea, Libya, Mali and Nepal. Needs often went unmet for large-scale protracted crises such as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for which only 43 per cent of the funding requested was secured.

III. Challenges to the humanitarian response

A. Humanitarian access

34. Complex humanitarian crises have increased the number of vulnerable children in need of assistance and protection, while making it more difficult for these children to reach and be reached by services. Roughly half of the required emergency funding in 2017 was for major humanitarian programmes in countries where UNICEF and partners faced critical access challenges. Many of these programmes were implemented in the context of increasingly protracted, violent and urban conflicts involving fragmented non-State entities and violations of international humanitarian and human rights law by all parties to conflict, including targeting of civilians and direct violence against humanitarian actors. In extreme cases, civilians, particularly women and children, have been trapped in besieged areas and/or parties to a conflict have used access to humanitarian assistance as a bargaining chip in pursuit of political concessions.

35. In both conflict-affected and non-conflict settings, host Governments often use bureaucratic measures (e.g. visas and travel permits, clearance of goods) to limit and control humanitarian action in pursuit of political or other objectives. At the same time, the laws and policies of host Governments and Member States, such as counter-terrorism-related measures, can compromise access if humanitarian actors are perceived as aligned with the political or military objectives of national and international stakeholders. Some examples include policies that discriminate against specific populations by excluding them from assistance and protection based on partisan motivations rather than humanitarian needs.

36. UNICEF has developed several innovative approaches to overcome these access challenges. The Rapid Response Mechanism and mobile teams provide agile, flexible and swiftly deployable response capacities that effectively enable the delivery of life-

saving services in highly insecure areas. As part of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) pioneered a structured approach to integrating access and security issues into programme planning and analysis, and using access advisers and facilitators to help to expand coverage of immunization campaigns. UNICEF has also successfully used communication for development and the organization's strong advocacy voice and field presence to build local acceptance and enable critical programmes under challenging conditions. UNICEF is continuously strengthening staff capacities and support to effectively apply humanitarian principles and existing United Nations policies – including on security risk management, programme criticality, United Nations integration and civil-military coordination – and has developed additional policies and guidance on key access-related issues, such as transparent engagement with non-State entities.

37. While UNICEF has considerable experience in responding to access challenges, to date, efforts to systematically gather, reflect and expand on this experience and use it to inform more institution-wide approaches and strategies have not matched the scope of the challenges. Accordingly, in 2017, the UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes initiated a process to develop an institutional access framework for UNICEF. The framework will provide a structured and systematic approach to addressing these challenges in the field; equip staff with the necessary tools, guidance and support to effectively implement their approaches and strategies; and enable UNICEF to continuously gather, share and replicate good practices that can increase the organization's ability to deliver results for children.

B. Security and logistical constraints

38. Armed conflict, civil unrest, high-threat environments and targeting of humanitarian workers have made recent years the deadliest on record for the aid community. The frequent disrespect by parties to conflict of established norms and principles governing humanitarian action and the protection of civilians during the conduct of hostilities have posed even greater challenges. UNICEF is an active member of in-country security management teams, which are chaired by United Nations Designated Officials. UNICEF has also integrated security risk-management strategies into humanitarian action, which has strengthened the organization's ability to mitigate risk and stay and deliver, even in high-risk contexts.

39. UNICEF is investing in its security functions through staff training, hiring security experts to complement advisers from the United Nations Department of Safety and Security and procuring essential security equipment. Training covers topics such as safe and secure approaches in the field, women's security awareness, gender considerations and road safety. To meet global strategic and operational security needs, UNICEF has increased its staffing capacity at headquarters, recruited additional security advisers and deployed security staff to crisis-affected countries such as Afghanistan, Cameroon, Chad, the Central African Republic, Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine and Yemen.

C. Human resources

40. The growing number and complexity of humanitarian situations, including increasingly protracted crises, is stretching the ability of UNICEF to provide timely and effective responses. Identifying human resources in humanitarian situations remains one of the organization's greatest challenges.

41. Experience has shown that using surge mechanisms – such as the Emergency Response Team, the Immediate Response Team, Rapid Response Teams, standby partnerships and regional emergency rosters – improves the ability of UNICEF to efficiently and effectively scale up its response at the onset of an emergency. UNICEF has expanded all of these surge mechanisms in recent years. The expansion of the Emergency Response Team from 8 to 14 members in 2016 improved the organization's capacity to rapidly deploy staff with specialized skills in emergencies. The demand for rapid surge capacities has continued to rise, however, and during the period of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, UNICEF will further expand the Emergency Response Team to include 26 members.

42. UNICEF will also continue to invest in expanding its standby partnerships. Although standby partners represented a significant source of capacity in 2017, deploying 157 personnel for emergency response and an additional 23 for emergency preparedness through 20 organizations (out of 31 standby partners), partners faced issues deploying their personnel in conflict-affected countries and countries suffering from protracted crises. Sixteen per cent of UNICEF requests were abandoned in 2017, primarily due to lack of suitable candidates and of funding, and difficulty finding candidates with adequate language proficiencies. Cluster-specific information management is also increasingly requested, and, while partners are keen to provide support, suitable candidates are often unavailable. In addition, out of the 31 standby partners, UNICEF has only two private sector partners who, due to internal funding constraints, have provided decreasing levels of support.

D. Flexible and multi-year humanitarian funding

43. UNICEF draws on a range of resource mobilization options to support its humanitarian action. Although flexible thematic funds are among the most efficient and effective for the organization, UNICEF has continued to face challenges in raising thematic funding for the humanitarian response. In some cases, resources are not moving towards greater flexibility but rather towards greater conditionality, making it difficult to reach those who are most in need.

44. Given the increasingly protracted nature of humanitarian crises, predictable, flexible and longer-term funding has become essential and multi-year planning that much more crucial. UNICEF and the Government of Canada are co-leading an effort with other partners to strengthen multi-year planning for global humanitarian funding. As part of this work, in 2017, with the support of OCHA and the Norwegian Refugee Council, this included co-convening a workshop with donors, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations to share and consolidate good practices, challenges and lessons on multi-year planning and funding, and defining joint areas for engagement going forward. Internally in 2016, UNICEF developed guidelines for multi-year Humanitarian Action for Children appeals; and in 2018, four multi-year UNICEF appeals were launched for Afghanistan, Mali, the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe, and Syrian refugees.

45. The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 has a target of 15 country offices in protracted crisis having multi-year response plans, aligned with multi-year inter-agency plans. As multi-year plans are increasingly funded, UNICEF is committed to passing on this flexible funding to local partners.

IV. Lessons learned

46. The evaluation report *Towards improved emergency responses: synthesis of UNICEF evaluations of humanitarian action 2010–2016* has provided UNICEF an opportunity to take stock of priority issues emerging from evaluations over the past five years and refine the change processes triggered by the individual humanitarian evaluations. The report highlighted several issues that have been fully embraced in the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 related to improving efficiency and effectiveness for humanitarian results, summarized as follows:

(a) contributing to stronger coordinated inter-agency needs assessment to guide humanitarian response planning that is relevant to evolving humanitarian needs;

(b) strengthening results-based management, including planning and performance monitoring, across humanitarian and development programming;

(c) supporting a more systematic UNICEF and inter-agency collective approach to community engagement and putting people at the centre of humanitarian action;

(d) maintaining and strengthening partnerships with national and local humanitarian actors; and

(e) strengthening the connectedness and coherence between humanitarian action and development programming.

47. In addition, UNICEF has acknowledged the need to review the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action and adjust them to better guide work across emerging humanitarian crises, including health emergencies, mass population movements and protracted crises. UNICEF is also committed to further reinforcing implementation of its Simplified Standard Operating Procedures, especially in the context of Level 3 and Level 2 emergencies, to ensure faster and more effective delivery of at-scale humanitarian action. Finally, UNICEF recognizes the need to ensure better coverage of humanitarian evaluations. This will be addressed in the revised evaluation policy of UNICEF.

V. The way forward: Enhancing efficiency and effectiveness for humanitarian results

48. This section examines how UNICEF is striving to enhance efficiency and effectiveness for humanitarian results, in line with the findings outlined above, the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and ongoing humanitarian and development system reforms.

A. Strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus

49. As a dual-mandated agency, UNICEF is well placed to position its humanitarian action to contribute to development outcomes and its development programme to take into consideration the risks and drivers of humanitarian crises. The organization is

therefore striving to ensure that its humanitarian action and development programming are mutually reinforcing and contribute to common objectives. This way, UNICEF can contribute to longer-term resilience and national and local capacities to anticipate and prepare for risks related to disaster, conflict, climate change and other shocks. Humanitarian action is more effective when built upon established development programmes, and life-saving actions for children and women living in emergencies can sow the seeds of development.

50. For example, in 2017 in the Gambella region of Ethiopia, which is close to the South Sudan border, UNICEF designed and built a permanent water system that provided clean and safe water for nearly 250,000 South Sudanese refugees and host communities. This water system not only provides immediate access to clean water but will also be operational for the long-term – an example of programming that meets both immediate needs and serves development goals.

51. The Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 represents the organization's strongest framework for integrating its dual humanitarian and development mandates and is closely aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and ongoing humanitarian and development system reform efforts. In addition to including key humanitarian results under each Goal Area, the Plan also identifies critical entry points and enablers for strengthening the connections between development and humanitarian programming for a more effective and efficient humanitarian response. Reporting on its contributions under the Strategic Plan will allow UNICEF to track its progress in this regard through a selection of key performance indicators.

52. As part of its effort to strengthen coherence and connectedness in its humanitarian and development programming, UNICEF has continued to invest in enhancing early warning and early preparedness. In 2017, the organization initiated the roll-out of the Emergency Preparedness System, which is comprised of the corporate Procedure on Preparedness for Emergency Response (issued in December 2016), an Emergency Preparedness Platform (EPP; piloted in 2017 and scheduled to launch in 2018), and a humanitarian learning package (issued in 2017).

53. The EPP is an online tool that will help teams to analyse risks, self-assess the capacity in-country, identify high-return actions and get ready to respond before an emergency happens or a situation deteriorates. This includes actions such as the pre-positioning of emergency supplies; identifying and contracting implementing partners for critical interventions; and conducting emergency preparedness and response training for staff. The platform is flexible and dynamic, allowing for continuous changes and improvements as risks and operating contexts change. It was designed to foster strong collaboration and learning across countries and regions, as well as at the global level. In 2017, the EPP was piloted in 6 country offices and released to 40 country offices.

54. The value of preparedness and the utility of these tools were illustrated in Uganda in 2017, where a case of Marburg virus disease was declared by the Ministry of Health in mid-October. The preparedness process undertaken at the country level in the months before the outbreak enabled UNICEF, in collaboration with WHO and other United Nations organizations, to provide rapid support to the Ministry, which ultimately contained the outbreak to three cases. The process included a risk analysis; definition of outbreak scenarios; definition of the anticipated response, including the specific role of UNICEF; and the inclusion of key preparedness actions, in line with

the UNICEF Procedure on Preparedness for Emergency Response in the UNICEF Uganda workplan.

55. Risk-informed programming is a central change strategy in the Strategic Plan, through which UNICEF will reorient its planning and programming processes to better support national Governments to pursue humanitarian and development goals. A number of countries are rolling out risk-informed programming. For example, in 2017, UNICEF supported a municipal flood vulnerability exercise in a flood-prone area in Mali. Annual flood likelihood was mapped using drones and hand-held devices to record houses, number of inhabitants and resident interviews. The information gathered, which included an estimate of how many children would be affected, enabled municipal authorities and development partners to be better prepared for flooding.

56. Increased emphasis by UNICEF on partnerships that span humanitarian action and development programmes has also been demonstrated in Yemen, where the World Bank Group, UNICEF and WHO collaborated through a $320 million International Development Association (IDA) 18 allocation for an emergency health, nutrition and WASH programme. In addition to helping to keep health systems functional, IDA funding helped to limit the spread of an outbreak of acute watery diarrhoea and cholera at the household level. Diarrhoea treatment centres and oral rehydration points were established and operationalized in 20 (out of 21) governorates. Nearly 5 million children were vaccinated against polio, also due to IDA funding.

57. Under the IDA partnership, an additional $200 million was also provided for the cash transfer programme in Yemen, which has strengthened national social protection systems and benefited over 1.3 million of the most vulnerable households, reaching nearly one-third of the population. The IDA 18 partnership has represented a unique opportunity to work across the humanitarian-development nexus by providing longer-term financing windows in fragile contexts. This builds on the growing awareness that engaging early in fragile and conflict-affected contexts is critical to ensuring a timely, accelerated development trajectory.

B. Expanding support for local and national responders

58. Humanitarian programming can achieve better development outcomes by contributing to building more resilient and responsive national and local systems. System strengthening, at both the national and subnational levels, is a core strategy in UNICEF humanitarian action. By strengthening systems, UNICEF contributes to enhancing the resilience of communities and societies, building the capacities of communities to protect and address the needs of vulnerable children in humanitarian crises and making progress towards the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.

59. A key aspect of the UNICEF approach to systems strengthening is partnering with and building the capacities of local and national actors, including Governments, civil society organizations and the private sector, to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transaction costs. UNICEF has committed to allocating at least 30 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national actors, in line with the global commitment to reach an aggregate of 25 per cent by 2020. In 2017, UNICEF met this target, with transfers to local and national responders accounting for 31 per cent of humanitarian expenditure.

60. As an example of the UNICEF emphasis on partnering with national organizations, in the context of the partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), 117 UNICEF country offices have

established active or planned programme cooperation agreements with national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies and the IFRC. These agreements have covered a range of areas, including the humanitarian response, disaster preparedness and contingency planning; and programme delivery, which involved more than 37,000 staff and 2.4 million volunteers of national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies and the IFRC. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, in order to build local capacity and strengthen disease outbreak response, the national Red Cross trained 1,000 volunteers in 20 health zones. The formalization of these partnerships has not only facilitated programme delivery, but has also allowed UNICEF to track and achieve greater results for children before, during and after emergencies.

61. UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and WFP are also developing a United Nations partner portal, which will serve as an online platform for civil society organizations to create organizational profiles, view opportunities for partnership with the United Nations and submit both solicited and unsolicited proposals. It is anticipated that the portal will further increase opportunities for civil society organizations, especially local and national responders, to make themselves known to and interact with the United Nations, and increase the transparency and results focus of United Nations partnership selection processes.

C. Increasing the use and coordination of cash-based programming

62. UNICEF increasingly implements cash-based programmes, which serve as a key modality for covering humanitarian needs and catalysing longer-term national system strengthening in social protection. Cash-based programmes help to preserve the dignity of populations affected by crises by empowering them to determine and prioritize their own immediate needs. Cash-based programmes also promote resilience by stimulating local economies and markets and strengthening national systems and partnerships for effective humanitarian response.

63. In 2017, UNICEF and partners reached more than 1 million crisis-affected people with humanitarian cash transfers (57 per cent of the target). Thirteen UNICEF country offices – the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominica, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Myanmar, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and Yemen – used humanitarian cash transfers as part of their response over the course of the year.

64. To increase the use of cash-based programming and inter-agency collaboration and strengthen coordination of cash programmes, UNICEF has established, within the Office of Emergency Programmes, a technical team that includes capacity for coordination, field support and knowledge management. The team has developed organization-wide technical guidance on cash-based transfers in humanitarian settings and has continued to foster inter-agency collaboration on cash-based programming.

65. UNICEF is also working with UNHCR and WFP to establish common cash programmes. For example, in Jordan and Lebanon, the three organizations have jointly developed a single cash delivery mechanism. This collaboration has allowed the organizations to scale up more rapidly, reaching nearly 140,000 beneficiaries in 2017 and facilitating more efficient, streamlined and effective programming that builds on the relative strengths of each actor.

D. Improving joint needs assessment, monitoring and reporting

66. UNICEF is also striving to improve its monitoring and reporting mechanisms to better assess children's needs, analyse programme results, identify gaps and implement course corrections, including through community engagement.

67. UNICEF actively participates in inter-agency processes to strengthen impartial, transparent and coordinated needs assessment and analysis. This includes work carried out through UNICEF-led global cluster coordination teams, which contribute to a range of data initiatives across sectors. At the field level, this contributes to needs identification on a sector-by-sector basis and is consolidated in an overview analysis. For example, UNICEF contributes technical support and training to the International Organization for Migration-led Displacement Tracking Matrix for children on the move, which operates in 39 countries and aims to improve the quality of data on education and child protection. Under its Data for Children Strategic Framework, UNICEF is also investing in strengthening collective outcome monitoring in crisis-affected countries, including connecting to longer-term development data-collection processes. This involves establishing partnerships beyond humanitarian actors to include foundations, research institutions and the private sector; agreeing on context-specific methods; and investing in real-time technologies (e.g. SMS-based systems) within national systems, wherever possible. Ongoing work includes pilot programmes in Ethiopia, Lebanon, Myanmar, the Philippines, South Sudan, the State of Palestine and Uganda, among others.

68. UNICEF is also working to reduce duplication and management costs. A UNHCR-UNICEF initiative currently under way aims to reduce transaction costs for partners and agencies by undertaking joint audits of shared partners. UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP have compared their existing assessment approaches and reached an agreement on the harmonization of due diligence assessments. Opportunities for further harmonization with OCHA and other United Nations organizations are also currently being pursued.

69. At the field level in 2017, 48 of 53 country offices with a Humanitarian Action for Children appeal had systems to track priority high-frequency indicators, and 15 of the year's larger responses had established scaled-up field monitoring systems. UNICEF is working to enhance field monitoring by improving the focus on the quality of humanitarian interventions and more systematically integrating feedback from affected populations. Forthcoming modules in the UNICEF information management platform, eTools, will address both partner reporting and field monitoring, including specific adaptations to strengthen programme monitoring for humanitarian response. The platform will also support better data disaggregation; improve quality assurance of monitoring data; facilitate the systematic inclusion of feedback from affected populations and tracking of follow-up actions; and enable integrated analysis of both humanitarian and development results.

70. UNICEF is investing in strengthening humanitarian programme monitoring based on lessons learned, reviews and evaluations. Global efforts to improve programme monitoring focus on adjusting guidance, tools and training to support more flexible monitoring approaches as relevant to different humanitarian contexts. To this end, in 2017, more than 900 staff members from 38 countries with an ongoing humanitarian response participated in results-based management training that included risk-informed programme design and adapted approaches to programme monitoring.

71. At the inter-agency level, UNICEF is supporting a systematic cluster coordination performance monitoring system that assesses performance against core cluster functions (i.e. supporting service delivery; informing strategic decision-making for the humanitarian response; planning and strategy development; advocacy; monitoring and reporting; contingency planning, preparedness and capacity building; and accountability to affected populations (AAP). On behalf of the UNICEF-led clusters, the eTools project will soon be supporting the development of a cluster partner reporting platform, which will be inter-operable with OCHA platforms and allow partners to enter data once and be able to reuse the data for various reporting requirements, including reporting to UNICEF.

72. These enhancements to inter-agency needs assessment and monitoring practices and systems will contribute to better decision-making for needs-based response planning that is adjusted to the changing humanitarian situation. UNICEF is also investing in stronger evidence generation and knowledge management processes and platforms to further strengthen humanitarian action.

73. Transparency in reporting also remains a key priority for UNICEF. The organization is currently ranked as the third most transparent out of 46 major donor organizations worldwide, according to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) 2016 Transparency Index, and the UNICEF Transparency Portal (open.unicef.org) facilitates direct communication to the public on how and where the organization uses resources. UNICEF is also a member of the IATI Governing Board, and has used this platform to shape the global transparency agenda, advocate for increased use of the IATI open-data standard in humanitarian reporting, and drive global efforts for more efficient and effective use of aid.

74. UNICEF has confronted challenges in its efforts to improve humanitarian assessment, monitoring and reporting. Inter-agency work to strengthen needs assessment and analysis initially faced a lack of convergence and prioritization of efforts, but joint advocacy on common priorities has improved planning. In addition, technical glitches in the development of the eTools software have delayed the release of pivotal products supporting reporting and monitoring by UNICEF and its cluster partners.

75. Looking ahead, the development of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 has established a clear results framework for humanitarian performance monitoring. The Plan identifies key humanitarian results under each Goal Area that articulate UNICEF commitments to responding to acute humanitarian needs, as well as critical change strategies and enablers for stronger humanitarian action, including efficiency and effectiveness measures, each with key performance indicators. Changes to reporting systems in line with the Strategic Plan will be rolled out over the course of 2018.

76. UNICEF will also roll out the above-mentioned eTools modules in 2018–2019 to support UNICEF and cluster partner reporting and piloting in the field, as well as updated training to strengthen monitoring. At the inter-agency level, UNICEF will support the more systematic use of cluster coordination performance monitoring tools, including adapted light workshop-based tools. UNICEF will continue to support inter-agency processes and country-level efforts aimed at strengthening coordinated needs assessment and outcome monitoring in humanitarian situations.

E. Strengthening accountability to affected populations

77. In line with the efforts to enhance needs assessment and monitoring approaches and practices outlined above, UNICEF is improving its engagement with affected populations by facilitating their participation in the humanitarian response; fostering two-way communication with affected communities; and establishing and/or strengthening feedback and complaint mechanisms. This work builds on country level investments in scaling up behaviour change and community engagement programming, including through real-time monitoring at scale, to give affected people, including children, a direct link to their Governments to report on services.

78. For example, in Yemen, UNICEF trained more than 6,000 community volunteers to assess needs and monitor the organization's response, thus allowing UNICEF to connect with communities, receive feedback and use it to ensure that the assistance is appropriately targeted and also feeds into the programme design for the next phase of the response. In Sierra Leone, UNICEF coordinated with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation to use information reported via mobile phones and collected through U-Report on 13,647 children screened for malnutrition, including 468 identified cases of acute malnutrition, to identify gaps in the supplementary feeding programme. The information was shared at the level of the humanitarian country team and enabled WFP to temporarily establish new nutrition services in seven health centres to meet the increased need.

79. The work of UNICEF has also focused on cluster performance management. Progress has been made towards defining common cluster AAP actions as part of the humanitarian programme cycle, and core concepts and actions have been tested through the Global Nutrition Cluster coordination training. Initial work on adapting the Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring approach with a stronger focus on quality and accountability was completed with the Global Education Cluster, and tested in the Sudan and Yemen.

80. At the inter-agency level, UNICEF established the Communication and Community Engagement Initiative in early 2017, in partnership with OCHA, IFRC, the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities Network and several other partners. The initiative aims to develop collective services for more timely, systematic and predictable communication and community engagement mechanisms across humanitarian actors and clusters or sectors. In 2017, the initiative was rolled out in Bangladesh, the Central Africa Republic and Yemen. As cluster lead agency, UNICEF supported the integration of common approaches around accountability at the level of UNICEF-led and co-led clusters and areas of responsibility, working with the global clusters on guidance and tools.

81. In 2018, UNICEF will develop an organization-wide approach to AAP, building on existing good practices and bringing the relevant parts of the organization together in a collective and unified effort. This will focus, in particular, on the need to 'close the feedback loop' so that UNICEF programmes are better informed by the views of and feedback received from affected communities. A similar focus will be done at the inter-agency level through work with partners engaged in focus countries, so as to ensure more robust approaches to collective feedback mechanisms.

82. In the context of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, UNICEF is working closely with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse to strengthen community-based complaint mechanisms. UNICEF is exploring

how to adapt existing SMS-based technology, such as U-Report, to support community-based complaint mechanisms and to enable communities and victims to report cases of sexual abuse and exploitation faster, safer and confidentially.

VI. Conclusion

83. UNICEF is committed to continuing to strengthen its approach to humanitarian action to meet the challenges of the complex global landscape. This includes improving the delivery of life-saving services in emergencies and providing assistance that better meets the unique needs of the most vulnerable, including girls, children with disabilities and other marginalized groups. UNICEF will continue to systematically mainstream issues related to children with disabilities in the humanitarian response, focusing on inclusion and accessibility across policies, programmes, capacity and supplies. The organization will also continue to engage in the United Nations reform of its operational procedures to support a more strategic approach to the Sustainable Development Goals, and remains focused on supporting a system that is more responsive to country situations and government priorities; better able to assess risk and prevent crises; and more strategic and efficient in its institutional arrangements.

VII. Draft decision

The Executive Board

Takes note of the annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action (E/ICEF/2018/10).